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ABSTRACT

This booklet lists and discusses different approaches that States can take in order to provide leadership in school desegregation. Emphasis is placed on the services provided by DSP that can help States assume a major responsibility for achieving school desegregation. Two services provided by DSP are described: a clearinghouse of information on State laws, regulations, policies and programs; and a technical assistance program which is designed to offer States concrete assistance in developing desegregation policies and programs. (Author/EB)

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The National Project and Task Force

on Desegregation Strategies

DSP

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Cover art by Stephen Allen

THE DSP STORY

As part of its commitment to equal educational opportunity, the Elementary/Secondary Education Department of the Education Commission of the States has joined with the National Association of State Boards of Education and the Council of Chief State School Officers in sponsoring the National Project and Task Force on Desegregation Strategies (DSP). Funded by the Ford Foundation, the National Institute of Education and the U.S. Office of Education, DSP is helping to build a strong and vital state role in school desegregation. For further information or additional copies of this brochure, contact Ben Williams, Director, National Project and Task Force on Desegregation Strategies, Education Commission of the States, Suite 300, 1860 Lincoln St., Denver, Colo. 80295. Phone: (303) 861-4917.

STATES, SCHOOLS AND DESEGREGATION

The states have a role to play in developing desegregation strategies that will enhance the quality of education. In fact, state governments are emerging as a key ingredient in the work to eliminate segregation in all phases of education. And now they have a new resource to assist them.

The National Project and Task Force on Desegregation Strategies (DSP) is helping the states find ways to exercise more effective leadership toward comprehensive state planning in providing equal opportunity in education.

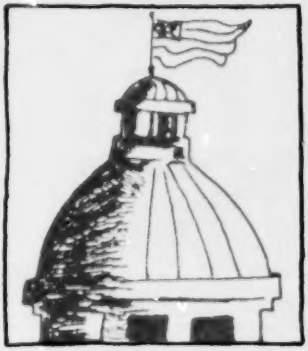
The task force, a group of 22 highly respected policy makers and experts, is examining desegregation issues in order to identify strategies that will be workable at the state level. The project, located in Denver at the Education Commission of the States, offers a national clearinghouse of information on state practices as well as technical assistance to help the states develop policies and programs.

Together, the project and task force are furnishing the states an important service and providing new vision at a time when both are critically needed.

Why the States?

Education is primarily a state responsibility. State constitutions and statutes provide the legal framework for schools, while state legislatures and boards of education set goals, determine district boundaries, make policy, establish the overall pattern of financing and contribute a substantial portion of school funding. Clearly, state involvement in desegregating schools is essential.

For the most part, however, states have generally left the elimination of segregation in education to the courts and to individual school districts at the local level. They have generally not used their full authority to provide equal education opportunities in local schools. But the process of desegregating education has by no means been accomplished. Many are now looking to the states as the missing link for making equal educational opportunity a reality.



According to *The State Role in School Desegregation*, a report prepared in 1977 by the Stanford Research Institute (SRI), only nine states can be considered as having active desegregation programs – i.e., as taking positive, self-initiated steps at the state level to eliminate school segregation. The report goes on to say that, of the nine states with active programs, only five – Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania – are considered to have a comprehensive state role.

While these states have not been without problems, the advantage of early planning was noted in an article appearing in *U.S. News and World Report* in November 1977: "States that started early to solve desegregation problems report success in integrating local schools without the need for court orders that frequently result in disruptive busing plans." The message is that state action can be effective and that such action is feasible.

Some Key Issues

Desegregation is not a single issue that can be addressed in isolation from other issues. Rather, it must be worked out in conjunction with a complex array of state problems and policies. Here are some examples of issues to be addressed:

- Adequate funding for quality education and the role of desegregation in relation to quality education.
- The role of state boards in the desegregation process.
- Implications of desegregation plans for bilingual/bicultural programs.
- State legislative authority for initiating and enforcing desegregation.
- State financial programs and incentives to encourage voluntary remedies.
- Policies to encourage community economic stability, especially through housing and economic programs.
- Federal legislation to aid the states in desegregation.
- Inservice training and community participation in the desegregation process.
- Evaluating and monitoring desegregation policies.

It is clear even from this brief list that there are many approaches the states can take in order to provide leadership in school desegregation. The first step is commitment, resolve and determination among policy makers whose actions can make a difference.

What Can the States Do?

To see what kinds of actions the states can take, here are some characteristics attributed to the five most active states by the SRI report:

- A strong commitment to desegregation by the state board of education, the state education agency and the chief state school officer.

- Authority in state law to eliminate segregated schooling.

- Programs to identify segregation and to help the local education agencies develop and implement desegregation plans.

- Relatively large desegregation staffs, developed pursuant to and funded under federal acts, with direct access to the chief state school officer.

- A variety of training programs, seminars, workshops, conferences, and meetings to assist local school boards, superintendents, administrators, teachers, students, parents and community groups in the desegregation process, with heavy emphasis on multiracial, multicultural and human relations understanding in these programs.

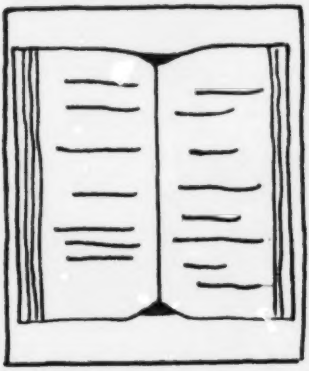
- Development and review of curriculum and instructional materials to eliminate racial bias and promote multicultural understanding.

- Review and approval of local construction plans to insure that the school sites chosen will be accessible to both minority and nonminority neighborhoods.

- Extensive interaction between the state education agency and local school district administrators, teachers, students, parents, legislative bodies and community groups.

Where DSP Fits In

Many educators believe that school desegregation has reached an important and complex juncture. The time is ripe for an infusion of new energy and ideas as well as consolidation of the strategies that have been successful in the past. The creation of the National Project and Task Force on Desegregation Strategies (DSP) provides a fresh opportunity to reach a consensus on where to go from here and a vehicle to assist state officials in building a strong state leadership role in the next phase of the desegregation process.



Leadership depends upon knowledge – knowing what the options are and being able to find out what works and what doesn't. Public officials cannot work effectively in isolation. To aid them in this task, DSP has developed a clearinghouse of information on state laws, regulations policies and programs, and provides technical assistance to the staff to help them in developing policies and programs.

There is a whole range of strategies that can work to facilitate desegregation in various situations. No one will suit the needs of every state. But for the most part, state officials do not have sufficient information, perspective, forms of institutional cooperation or technical know-how at their disposal to provide strong leadership. The main thrust of DSP is to encourage and assist state board members, chief state school officers and other appropriate state officials, including elected political officials, to assume a major responsibility for achieving school desegregation. By combining a national perspective and an understanding of state needs, DSP is working to achieve this goal.

The Clearinghouse

In order to meet the needs of the states, the project has established a clearinghouse of written information relevant to the states' responsibilities in the desegregation process. The clearinghouse includes information in four key areas:

- **Legal Analysis.** Quarterly reviews of significant state and federal court decisions defining state responsibilities for desegregation.

- **Successful Practices.** Compilations of case studies demonstrating successful desegregation experiences as well as legislation, policy, resolutions, regulations and descriptions of state programs and services designed to implement desegregation strategies, and local education program activities undertaken in conjunction with the state agency.

- **Inservice Training.** Materials on inservice training strategies, which can be used as the basis for seminars and technical assistance on inservice training at the state and local levels.

- **Research.** Special studies relevant to state policy development, including materials produced elsewhere as well as those generated by the project to address issues that the task force or the states themselves have indicated are of primary concern.

In addition to issuing a regular project newsletter, the staff periodically publishes a list of materials available in the last three categories above. Also available is updated information on organizations, programs and current research. In addition, the clearinghouse channels information from other data centers into the DSP dissemination network, thus routing up-to-date information to state officials and others concerned with desegregation.

Technical Assistance

The DSP technical assistance program operates in two ways. First, the staff coordinates conferences and policy seminars on important topics of interest to the states. The staff maintains contact with desegregation practicioners and researchers to keep abreast of effective practices and new findings that the project can "showcase" through conferences and seminars. Through the Desegregation Policy/Practice Institute, DSP brings state officials into contact with reliable research and tested practices. Institute seminars focus on major issues of desegregation planning, and follow-up activities help to monitor implementation in the states.

Second, the staff and outside consultants provide direct assistance to the states in the formulation of legislation, policy development, the planning of state human relations and teacher training programs, legal issues and other areas of state desegregation planning. The cost of these services is shared by the states.

In summary, DSP helps the states by providing concrete forms of assistance in developing desegregation policies and programs. Available services include:

- Seminars and conferences on topics relating to the state role in desegregation.
- Resource persons available to provide technical assistance on specific desegregation strategies, policies and programs.
- Continuing assistance to states working on long-range planning for equal educational opportunity.

To find out how the National Task Force on Desegregation Strategies can help in your state, write or call Ben Williams, Director, National Project and Task Force on Desegregation Strategies, Education Commission of the States, Suite 300, 1860 Lincoln St., Denver, Colo. 80295. Phone: (303) 861-4917.

The National Task Force

The National Task Force on Desegregation Strategies, chaired by former U.S. Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel, held its first meeting in November 1977. Since then it has moved to pinpoint the critical issues facing the states in desegregation. The group of 22 nationally respected experts and state and local officials in the field of equal educational opportunity is charged with defining issues for study and data collection, specifying important policy areas in which alternatives should be developed for state and local use, and guiding the activities of the project staff.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit organization formed by interstate compact in 1966. Forty-six states, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are now members. Its goal is to further a working relationship among governors, state legislators and educators for the improvement of education. The commission offices are located at Suite 300, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver, Colorado 80295.

It is the policy of the Education Commission of the States to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.

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